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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child

Statement submitted by Coalition against Trafficking in Women, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, UNANIMA International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Statement

Introduction

At this 51st session of the Commission for Status of Women (CSW), we, international NGOs, draw attention to the "elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child," particularly the migrant girl child.

Reality of the Girl Child and Migration:

While migration offers hope and positive benefits every year to millions of men, women and children around the world and the countries that receive them, migration can also have serious consequences, especially for children. A number of forms of migration increase the vulnerability of girls in particular. In the absence of adequate polices related to girl children, girls face severe violence and discrimination in migrant situations.

Every day NGO personnel meet girl children migrants in sub-Saharan Africa who have been sold by their parents in order to pay family debts or a son's dowry. They meet girl children in the Americas sent across international borders to provide domestic services, either for wages or in exchange for access to education. Unfortunately, wages are not paid, and educational access does not materialize. As the ILO states, "The largest employment category for girls under 16 is domestic work."[1] Such situations constitute a dangerous environment, most often without regulation or protection. Indeed, these isolated girls are often subject to sexual abuse with nowhere to turn. Members of our NGOs visit detention facilities in African urban areas where women are in custody and criminalized for being prostituted. Many detainees are under eighteen years of age and have been trafficked from neighboring countries. Some of the girls are even under the age of twelve and are traumatized by abuse and by being thrust into an unknown environment with strangers.

Beyond these severe cases of exploitation of the girl child in irregular (but not uncommon) migration, girls are at risk and vulnerable to exploitation even when regular migration occurs. Girls are sometimes left behind alone or with distant relatives when family members migrate. Often they are married at a young age or become domestic or sexual slaves of relatives. In many cases, they are denied education and have little or no access to health care, even though they are more vulnerable to diseases, including HIV/AIDS, than their brothers.

All too often girls who migrate with families find scant social protection. In shelters and camps girls are the most vulnerable to rape and disease. As migrants they are denied full protection of the law, even when they have proper legal papers and documents. While all children tend to be marginalized, migrant girl children are even more vulnerable.

We know that about half of the migrants from developing countries are aged between 12 and 29 years old. Still, accurate and comprehensive sex-disaggregated data about the migration of girl children and its effects are minimal.

[1] Child Labor: (Targeting the Intolerable, Report submitted to the 86th Session of Int. Labor Conf, Geneva ILO Office 1998)

Further, up to 50% of the over 1.2 million persons trafficked each year are children. We note also that there are strong links between human trafficking and migration policies. The United Nations Population Fund UNFPA, State of the World Population Report: Selling Hope and Stealing Dreams, 2006 says that "trafficking is not only one of the most horrific manifestations of migration 'gone bad,' it also undermines national security and stability." It further states that increasingly restrictive immigration policies limit the possibility of legal entry [into another country], which in turn drives more and more would-be migrants, particularly women and girls, to unwittingly entrust themselves to traffickers.

Economic development fueled by migration should not be promoted at the expense of girl children. Any short-term gains are far outweighed by the costs associated with violence against women and girls such as health care and criminal justice responses to commercial sexual exploitation. Further detail on these costs can be found in the 2006 report of the Secretary General.[2]

Despite international human rights obligations, states often fail to provide social protection to the girl child, particularly the girl child who is moving between one state or region and another. Societies continue to be characterized by male domination and patriarchal political, economic and social structures, which disadvantage girls from birth. The perpetrators of violence against girls proceed with impunity. The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women cites the lack of rights afforded to women as one of the primary causative factors at the root of both migration and trafficking. When half the world's population is discriminated against, this denial of individuals' human rights expands to become a persistent threat to social stability and global security. Changing a gender paradigm by which women and girls are objects of male aggression is necessary to realize the advancement of women in social, political or economic life.

We urgently affirm the need for full implementation of Section L of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) and Articles 19, 20, and 34-36 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We remind the CSW that at the 2005 World Summit, world leaders reaffirmed their previous commitments to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls. At its sixtieth session, the General Assembly adopted resolution 60/141 on the girl child, which expressed deep concern about discrimination against the girl child and the violation of her rights and stressed the importance of a substantive assessment of the implementation of the BPFA with a life-cycle perspective.

Effective Practices Make a Difference

We are aware that NGOs and governments have made efforts to protect and empower girls, supporting their participation in development of programs and structures that afford them rights and opportunities. We encourage the international community to build on existing effective practices.

Education is essential in effective practices. In Mexico, the Coalition against Trafficking in Women, Latin America, has developed, with the participation of youth, a series of trainings on human rights that are used for boys and girls in school. The Coalition in Mexico has also presented public service spots, which raise the consciousness of boys regarding the harm of discrimination and violence to women and girls.

[2] In-depth Study on all Forms of Violence Against Women, A Report by the Secretary General; A/61/122/Add.1

Prevention strategies also counter discrimination against girls. An international micro-enterprise project of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Handcrafting Justice, supports local skills training and economic empowerment for women and girls. Thus, girls need not migrate from their home communities but can participate in the economic life of their communities, including education and personal development, in a safe environment. Their skills empower them to resist recruiters who try to lure them into activities where they are vulnerable to discrimination and violence.

Government-NGO partnerships can model possibilities in the global reality. For example, in Italy the government contacts NGOs when victims of international trafficking are being repatriated to home countries such as Nigeria. The NGOs make use of networking in Nigeria to alert Nigerian NGOs of arrivals. Thus the women can be welcomed safely and not be re-trafficked again.

Recommendations

We call on this Commission to meet these urgent issues by developing an unambiguous statement denouncing all forms of violence against girls, with special attention to migrating girls. Such a statement must include mechanisms for enforcement and monitoring.

Specifically we recommend that governments

• Ratify and implement the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (Adopted by General Assembly resolution 45/158, 1990). Destination states have a particular responsibility for this implementation.

• Support the creation of an inclusive UN Forum on migration, following the recommendations of the General Assembly High Level Dialogue on Migration of September 2006. Ensure that such a Forum includes meaningful participation of persons who have been migrants.

• Articulate a coherent national policy explicitly denouncing all violence, including the prostitution of girls, as a violation of the human rights of women. Review and amend laws that structurally support inferiority of girls and women (e.g., dowry laws, marriage laws, property laws, etc.)

• Support public service campaigns on national levels that promulgate clear messages opposing violence against girls and women and articulating support for gender equality in all spheres of life.

• Integrate a gender and age sensitive approach in comprehensive management of migration.

• Make clear, specific and local recommendations not only about ending particular forms of violence, but about transforming the patriarchal social and economic systems that disadvantage women and girls and make them vulnerable in the processes of migration.

• Base migration policy on the standard that migrant must have equal access to basic services and protection of their human rights.

• Renew States' commitment to implement Section L of the Beijing Platform for Action and the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including strategies that will change cultural practices which discriminate against and oppress women and girls and promote conditions leading to the human development of all people.

We in the NGO community commit to support and work enthusiastically in partnership with all such initiatives by States Parties, the United Nations and other agencies.

Note:

Statement endorsed and supported by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council: Dominican Leadership Conference, Grail, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation, International Public Policy Institute, International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, Loretto Community, Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, Pax Christi International, School Sisters of Notre Dame, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, and World Movement of Mothers.